



City of San Marcos

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NEWS

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San Marcos Firefighters Sweat through Hazmat Training

Noxious, burning fumes wafted from the grounds of an abandoned school across from the A.E. Wood State Fish Hatchery on a blazing summer afternoon. When San Marcos firefighters arrived, they found a black 55-gallon drum laying on its side and spilling its unknown, poisonous contents onto the ground.

Luckily, it was only a drill.



TRAINING: Engineer Tory Turner, left, and firefighter Adam Cantwell of the San Marcos Fire Department set out to contain a simulated nitric acid spill July 29 during a hazardous material training exercise at the former Bowie Elementary School site.

maintain their technical knowledge and remain proficient at the complex skills required to mitigate these types of incidents.”

The San Marcos Fire Department conducted hazardous materials training July 26-28 at the site of the former Bowie Elementary School.

Firefighters from stations around the city rotated through the training lanes over the course of three days to prevent taking too many responders offline at one time.

“Ongoing training exercises like this one are crucial for our firefighters,” said San Marcos Fire Chief Les Stephens. “These hands-on type scenarios help them to

After the firefighters staged at the site, Capt. Aaron Crawford, the training officer for the exercise, gave them a bare-bones set of facts about the “hot zone,” designated which unit arrived first on scene, and let the firefighters take charge of the scene.



Firefighters carefully handle a suspect container in the ‘hot zone.’

The firefighters had to determine what kind of chemical was spilled, set up a decontamination site, and send a team into the hot zone to contain the spill—all in full gear in the summer heat. “Anything you do is ten times harder in the hazmat suits,” Crawford said after two fire fighters plugged the drum closed and sealed it in a bright yellow barrel.

Crawford developed and supervised the training event, designing multiple nasty scenarios to keep the firefighters on their toes.

Those who ran the morning scenarios faced a simulated nitric acid spill. During the afternoon and evening events, Crawford gave the firefighters simulated emergencies involving chlorine gas or the pesticide Diazinon.

“We’re not going to face a terrorist attack every day,” Crawford said. “These scenarios represent situations we’re more likely to face.”

All 60 members of the department completed the training. Forty-seven of the members are trained as Hazardous Materials Technicians and the remaining 13 are trained to the Operations level. All of the department’s Hazardous Material Technicians are required to receive an additional 10 hours of continuing education annually to maintain their certification.

There are four CBRNE (Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, and Explosive) hazardous materials teams within the CAPCOG region and the San Marcos Fire Department is the lead agency for Hays County. The department is responsible for responding to a ten- county area when requested and has primary responsibility for incidents in Hays, Fayette, Caldwell and Bastrop Counties.

“These types of events don’t occur every day, but we have to be prepared to handle them when they do,” Chief Stephens said.



Engineer Tory Turner of the San Marcos Fire Department doffs his hazmat suit July 29 after successfully completing a hazardous material training exercise at the former site of Bowie Elementary School.